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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee receives report on Little Singer Community School

LEUPP, Ariz. – On Monday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee received a report on the proposed planning and design phase of a new facility that will house the Little Singer Community School, which would replace the existing school in Birdsprings, Ariz.

Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi Tó'ii), who represents the community of Birdsprings, said he has advocated for the construction of the new school and expressed his concerns regarding the funding for the project.

“Our community wants to help because that is our role, to support the education of the children in our community,” said Delegate Phelps. “Currently, we are projecting that the construction project itself will cost about \$18 million.”

According to project manager Jeremiah LeMesa, construction is nearing the “shovel ready” stage, and is anticipating a grant from the Bureau of Indian Education for the design phase, which is based on a priority basis.

“The BIE has allocated \$950,000 to aid in the design [phase] of three tribal schools—two here on the Navajo reservation [Birdsprings and Cove, AZ], and one in [the state of] Maine,” said LaMesa. “We have completed the planning phase of the school and we are ready to begin the design phase.”

The BIE established a priority listing for the three schools, and is based on the project-readiness of each respective school. The funds will be awarded to the schools after funding for construction is fully obtained.

LaMesa also noted that funding from the BIE grant would be divided equally between the three schools, however, the community has advocated for Little Singer Community School to receive two-thirds, or approximately \$600,000 of the potential funding. Currently, the planning phase for the proposed school in the community of Cove has yet to be completed, added LaMesa.

HEHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) expressed his support for the proposed construction and suggested that the committee begin lobbying efforts for the approval of the BIE grant funding in Washington, D.C. in March.

“We will be meeting with Congressional leaders soon, so we need to go through the necessary channels to begin lobbying for the BIE funds, as well as to amend the priority listing to put Little Singer at the top of the list,” said Delegate Hale.

At the conclusion of the discussion, HEHSC members agreed to a deadline to collect the necessary information needed to begin lobbying for BIE funds for the design phase of the school, and to amend the BIE priority listing. The deadline is set for Feb. 24.

HEHSC members voted 4-0 to accept the report.

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